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ABSTRACT

Effective schools research indicates that principals heavily influence student achievement and school improvement. Although principals are responsible for administering special education programs and ensuring appropriate evaluation and placement of handicapped students, their university preparation and professional training have been minimal and fragmentary. Kentucky has developed and implemented a 13-day training program for principals called PRIDE (Principals, Resources, Information, and Direction for Excellence in Special Education). This program, consisting of four institutes spaced throughout the school year, is based on adult learning theory and an experiential learning model. PRIDE's first goal is to overcome professional isolation by offering principals peer support and a statewide communication system. The second goal, training principals in leadership skills for serving handicapped students, aims at on-the-job change. Objectives target attitudes and competencies needed to administer special education programs. Also, these new skills may be used to improve the total school program. Third-party quantitative and qualitative evaluations indicate desired changes in principals' attitudes and behavior (Author/MLH)

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Principals, Resources, Information and Direction for Excellence in Special Education

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Abstract

Research indicates that the principal plays an important role in student achievement and teachers' perceptions of the work environment. In addition to the impact of these factors on special education, principals are responsible for assuring appropriate evaluation and placement for handicapped students. However, university preparation and professional training in administration of special education have been minimum and fragmented.

Kentucky has developed and implemented a 13-day training program for principals. Project PRIDE (Principals, Resources, Information, and Direction for Excellence in Special Education), has been highly rated by participants. Third-party quanitative and qualitiative evaluation results indicate desired changes in principals' attitudes and on-the-job behaviors.

Introduction

Project PRIDE (Principals, Resources, Information, and Direction for Excellence in Special Education) has offered 13 days of training to a limited number of Kentucky's public school principals since 1984. The Project recognizes the important role of the principal as indicated by the "effective schools" research. While the Project's primary goal is to improve the educational experiences of handicapped students, training includes leadership skills which impact the quality of schooling for all students.

PRIDE training has been highly rated by participants, and third-party evaluation results indicate success in accomplishing all goals.

Goals, Objectives, Competencies

Two goals detail the scope of PRIDE. The first goal and accompanying objectives are essentially administrative as they form the framework for implementation. A portion of goal one, and a primary purpose of PRIDE, addresses the need for a system of peer support and a statewide communication system for principals. Frequently, small and/or rural school districts have only one principal for elementary and high school levels, or have only one principal managing all levels. In addition, it appears (though not documented) that some principals do not feel comfortable seeking help or advice from others in their district. For these reasons, many principals may be subject to the

"Maytag Repairman" or "loneliest guy in town" syndromes. They are often on their own, on the firing line, and frequently without an ally in sight. PRIDE offers principals opportunities to meet (formally and informally); to share problems, solutions and innovative ideas; and to build a comfortable give-and-take relationship with peers from across the Commonwealth of Kentucky.

Goal two, training of principals in leadership skills for serving handicapped children and youth, aims at on-the-job change. Objectives relate to:

1. Understanding feelings and attitudes toward working with handicapped individuals.
2. Working with parents of handicapped children.
3. Motivating handicapped children and youth.
4. Team building and group processing.
5. Effective and efficient implementation of state and federal requirements, and
6. Educational planning, goal assessment, and progress evaluation.

Training activities are based on target competencies related to knowledge and skills needed by principals to administer special education programs. However, removal of references to special education or handicapped persons, results in competencies which describe an effective administrator for the total school program. These competencies were identified through the State Education Agency (SEA) Comprehensive System of Personnel Development

needs assessments. Competencies were verified with PRIDE's Advisory Council composed of representatives from each of the professional organizations for principals (Kentucky Association of Elementary School Principals, Middle School, and Secondary School), the Kentucky Academy for School Executives, university administration preparation programs, special education cooperatives, and the Kentucky Department of Education. Four PRIDE principals are also council members.

Implementation

As Kentucky's public schools employ approximately 1620 principals and assistant principals, a train-to-train model has been used. That is, principals (24 during the first year, 19 during the second, and 30 during the third) participate in 13 days of PRIDE training directed by the SEA. These principals agree to provide at least 24 hours of replication training to a minimum of 6 other principals within their geographic areas. At least 570 principals are expected to have participated in PRIDE by the end of the third year.

As an incentive, each principal receives a $400 mini-grant to offset expenses for local replication. A serendipitous aspect has been a mandated leadership training requirement legislated by the Kentucky General Assembly in 1984. PRIDE offers 24 hours of the 42 hours of leadership training required for all administrators during each two-year period.

PRIDE training is conducted by SEA staff and core facilitators. Core facilitators provide peer training as four exemplary principals (2 elementary and a middle and high school) are selected each year from throughout the state. Each core facilitator also acts as leader for a group of principals who are divided on the basis of school level or geography. Core facilitators' functions include motivation of others, small-group facilitation of training activities, and a limited number of large-group training responsibilities.

The Training

Training activities are based on adult learning theory as well as the experiential learning model. Activities are designed to demonstrate a variety of methods and to provide opportunities for active individual, small group, and large-group participation. Principals are asked to construct and conduct mini-presentations, to present a small-group's product, or to facilitate a group activity.

Many of the activites are designed for experience-based learning. They are inductive rather than deductive and promote direct rather than vicarious learning. Principals discover meaning for themselves and validate personal experience. The publishing, processing, generalizing, and applying stages of the experiential learning model are stressed to insure recognition of the relevancy of training to actual school situations.

The 13 days of training are divided into 4 institutes. The first of these is scheduled for 4 days during the summer while the remaining 3 institutes (each 3 days in duration) are scheduled through the school year (usually October, December, and February).

PRIDE Training Institute One

The following objectives are addressed:

1. To train principals in the process of understanding feelings and attitudes toward working with handicapped individuals.
2. To train principals in skills for working with parents of handicapped children and youth.

Handicap awareness activities are conducted by a legally-blind person. Large-group simulations include being learning disabled, mentally retarded, and hearing impaired. Each principal then rotates through a series of centers designed to simulate arthritis, cerebral palsy (including speech problems associated with C.P.), blindness, hearing impaired with no oral language, and paralysis requiring a wheelchair for mobility. Center-directed activities include many assignments to be completed in public settings.

As a result of first-year experience, SEA staff modified training content to include adult learning theory and tips for conducting successful workshops. Principals practice application of adult learning theory and demonstrate various training techniques while exploring common myths about persons with handicaps.

Objective 2 addresses working with parents. Principals assess their schools' parental involvement programs; share problems, concerns, solutions and creative approaches; and explore levels of parental needs. General principles of communication are reviewed before parent communication is addressed. Conferencing skills are reviewed and then practiced in video-taped role plays with feedback.

Institute One closes with family sculpting, a counseling technique which is designed to demonstrate the impact of a handicapped child on the family. This emotionally-charged activity reinforces previous training components. A parent of a handicapped child is invited to attend this segment to confirm or negate the group's responses and to talk with the principals regarding that family's experiences.

Responses to Institute One have been consistently enthusiastic. Training activities have been replicated not only with administrators but with teachers and community groups. Institute One has been directed to providing an opportunity to move closer and experience handicaps. Psychological barriers are overcome, not through books, lectures or mandates, but through personal experiences which help us to sensitize ourselves emotionally or affectively as well as cognitively. Through training experiences, psychological barriers have been overcome, an acceptance of change has been accomplished, and individuals have bonded to form a team actively pursuing educational improvements.

PRIDE Training Institute Two

Here, training is directed to strategies and techniques for motivating handicapped students. SEA staff chose a training package "Developing Capable Young People" to address motivation through development of an internal locus of control (self responsibility) rather than an external application of motivational techniques.

"Developing Capable Young People" is a multi-session course initially developed under a grant from the South Carolina Commission on Alcohol and Drug Abuse by Stephen Glenn and Brenda Wagner. The materials in the course represent a distillation of years of research and training activities directed to defining and strengthening the parenting process.

For the purpose of the course, parenting is viewed as a process rather than a biological role. That is, parenting takes place whenever a more mature, more capable person interacts with a less mature, less capable person in order to increase the capability and maturity of the latter. Under this definition, parents, friends, teachers, clergy, counselors, etc. may be involved in, and contribute to, the process of developing capable young people.

The course is not directed to children with handicaps. Rather, it is directed toward providing "parents" with an opportunity to develop and enhance their skill and knowledge related to assisting young people become responsible, capable adults. This is accomplished by helping the young

people acquire some basic skills and perceptions. These skills and perceptions are:

1. Perception of oneself as a capable person.
2. Perception of being a part of something greater than self.
3. Perception of being in control of one's life.
4. Adequate development of interpersonal skills.
5. Well-developed situational skills.
6. Adequately developed judgmental skills.

Following an opening session, the remainder of training takes place in a small group with each member assigned a presentation segment. The total group is reassembled for the last of ten sessions. This is followed by a discussion of applicability.

Application of training has varied. Some have decided an immediate change was needed as they were holding pupils responsible for actions over which students had no control and imposing consequences which were neither natural or logical. A number of the principals were beginning to redesign their whole discipline system based on the course. A secondary-level principal convinced his superintendent to offer the course to the parents of all kindergarten children while an elementary principal started training groups at her school for both parents and teachers.

PRIDE Training Institute Three

The content of this institute relates to the principal's role as a leader of people with the premise that more effective leaders result in more effective teachers and in more effective learning for all students. As the focus of training is often process rather than content, many non-educational activities are used to alleviate the problem of emotional involvement while facilitating the focus on process. Of course, the application phase of the experiential learning model brings principals back to the school setting.

The institute begins with an introduction to group processing techniques. The Nominal Group Technique is demonstrated through the use of the nominal question: "What are the qualities of a good or successful leader?" Another activity uses the fishbowl technique (one group performing or role playing while the remainder of the participants observe, record, and report behaviors based on a structured questionaire).

Many of the training activities have been adapted from the University Associates Annuals and Handbooks of Structured Experiences. Concepts include:

1. The group decision-making process.
2. Dynamics of status, power and special knowledge in decision making.
3. Trust building and trust betrayal in a competitive situation.
4. Effects of hidden agendas on decision making.

5. Importance of securing information from all participants in a problem-solving situation.

Participants are also introduced to staff support teams (not to be confused with the mandated team approach to the evaluation and placement of handicapped children). Often a principal who has successfully implemented such a team concept is invited to share ideas with the group. Previously-conducted group dynamics and leadership experiences are related to the installation and maintenance of staff support teams.

One full day of training is spent in "The Diffusion Game", a simulation of acting as a change agent within a school. This board game promotes understanding of the interaction between adopter types, stages of adoption, and diffusion strategies. Participants are guided to develop a plan for the adoption of a particular innovation within their schools.

The impact of this institute has included self discovery related to leadership styles; sensitivity to, and understanding of group needs, and group dynamics; and increased proficiency in acting as a change agent.

PRIDE Training Institute Four

The spectrum of federal and state requirements related to programs for children with handicaps is addressed. A variety of methods are utilized including in-basket

assignments, role play with fishbowl, graphics, analogies, and case studies. The primary topics covered are child find, referral, modified instruction, child evaluation, least restrictive environment (LRE), the individualized education programs (I.E.P.'s), placement, and legal issues.

The purchase of a new suit is used in development of an analogy which introduces concepts of L.R.E., continuum of alternative placements, I.E.P., and appropriate placement. Application of the L.R.E. concept with its inherent components of placement continuum, evaluation, description of services, and placement is made through another analogy - that of the L.R.E. of senior citizens in our society.

Outcomes of this institute have included clarification of categorical labeling, description of special education and related services, and understanding of the value of the team process in making placement decisions which reflect the L.R.E. for individual students.

Project Evaluation

Data from pre and post-tests given at each training institute indicate that change has occurred. Additionally, participants have completed satisfaction-level evaluations at the conclusion of each training institute. The value of training has consistently been highly rated. On a five-point scale (with five being high) the following mean scores on the value of training have been obtained:

		Principals 14		
		1984-85	1985-86	1986-87
TRAINING INSTITUTE	I	4.41	4.79	4.70
	II	4.46	4.79	Not yet conducted
	III	4.47	4.53	Not yet conducted
	IV	4.75	4.59	Not yet conducted

The Office of Education for Exceptional Children, Kentucky Department of Education, contracted with the University of Kentucky Survey Research Center to conduct a third-party evaluation of PRIDE. A two-part evaluation strategy was developed with the expectation that a consistent pattern of evidence using both qualitative and quantitative methods would be a more reliable indicator than either approach used alone. The quantitative component was based on a quasi-experimental research design to assess anticipated differences between self-rated competencies of PRIDE principals and those of randomly-selected principals throughout Kentucky. The quantitative component was particularly concerned with the application of training.

Quantitative Evaluation

A quasi-experimental research design was used to provide an assessment of change. At the beginning of PRIDE Training Institute One and at the conclusion of Institute Four, PRIDE principals completed a survey which provided self ratings of their knowledge of the special education process and of specific administrative behaviors related to special education. These surveys were also completed on a pre and post basis by local-replication

trainees. These populations provided experimental group data.

Data from one control group was obtained through a random sampling of principals (not exposed to PRIDE) using the same instrument and same times of assessment. A second control group received the survey only on a post-test basis to reduce the possible threat to validity posed by previous exposure to the survey instrument.

Analysis of Covariance (ANCOVA) was used to examine differences between groups. Statistical controls included personal variables (sex, years of experience as a principal) and contextual variables (region of the state, total student population, number of special education students, grade levels, and urban/suburban/rural classifications).

During the first year of the project, 93.3 percent of the indicators reflected a statistically significant impact of PRIDE. For the second year, 63.3 percent reflected such an impact. This decrease may be due to the smaller number of PRIDE participants represented in the year-two analysis. In year one, 52.2 percent of the scores included in the ANCOVA models were PRIDE participants (N=72), compared to 16.4 percent in year two (N=17). Given the small number of PRIDE participants actually included in the year-two analysis, it may be remarkable that almost two-thirds of all program comparisons remained significant. In addition, this proportion of significant differences (63.3 percent) remained impressive and provided strong

evidence that those who received PRIDE training rated themselves higher than non-participants in terms of knowledge and actions regarding special education. During completion of post tests, several principals commented that we should not be surprised if these scores were lower than pre-test scores as training had sensitized them to realize how much they really did not know.

Qualitative Evaluation

Unstructured personal interviews were conducted to secure this information. During year one, only a post-training interview was possible; however, second-year procedures included fall and spring interviews.

Although the sample of school personnel interviewed was diverse, the focus of this sample was school principals, all of whom had been notified and had given their consent to be interviewed. The people interviewed included principals, special education coordinators, superintendents, assistant superintendents, school counselors, district psychometrists, teachers, and students.

Each participant was asked to express his or her special concerns, to note any problems in solving or implementing special education in that particular setting, to comment on the effectiveness of special education programs, and to describe the "climate for understanding and acceptance of special education students" in that

school and community. Project PRIDE itself was not mentioned by the interviewers during the fall interviews.

During the spring interviews, direct, open-ended questions about Project PRIDE were asked. Principals were requested to both describe and assess the workshops, to relate any changes (either in attitude or procedures) that they had brought back into their schools, and to share any suggestions for future Project PRIDE workshops. Teachers and other educators were asked to comment both on any observed changes in the principals' handling of, or commitment to, special education and on their school's overall climate regarding special education students and programs.

The purpose of the two-wave approach was to identify changes in the participants' attitudes or behaviors that might be a result of their work with Project PRIDE. During the first-wave interviews, principals expressed that they were genuinely concerned with the problems of special education students and teachers, were trying to make mainstreaming workable and were relying on their special education teachers or district coordinators for help in assessing needs and programs.

During the second-wave interviews, changes in the principals' attitudes and behaviors were noted both by the principals themselves and by other educators who worked with the principals. All of the principals who completed Project PRIDE training considered the program valuable. Foremost, they reported an increased understanding

and awareness of the special needs of handicapped persons. One participant commented on her new understanding and its effect on her outlook in this way, "We sat in wheelchairs, we were blindfolded, we understood what it is like to be handicapped.....I even began to look at bathrooms to see if they really met the needs of our handicapped students."

The single most consistent finding during the first year was that there had been a positive change in attitudes towards special education on the part of the principals who completed PRIDE training. A school superintendent referred specifically to an observed change in attitude. Improved attitudes on the part of principals had also been observed by staff members who were at best only vaguely aware of the purpose of PRIDE. The importance of changing principals' attitudes toward special education was underlined by an elementary school principal who, having discussed his own changing perceptions, emphasized that principals can "make or break their schools' attitudes." A diagnostician indicated that since PRIDE training, her principal had been much more aware of legalities and more interested in special education in general. One of the principals remarked that while he understood the legalities before training, he had not understood the intent of the laws. He felt that Project PRIDE had given him a sense of commitment to the laws.

In addition to understanding the process, principals volunteered that they had brought back and implemented

procedural changes, such as simplified filing and paperwork systems, which were appreciated by staff members. Another positive effect of Project PRIDE which was volunteered by a team leader was her increased interaction - both social and professional - with her peers and her feeling of group interest and support. She said, "I feel like now (after Project PRIDE training) I could call any of these people and ask how do you do this."

Follow-Up Interviews

A third component of the second-year evaluation consisted of telephone interviews with several PRIDE participants trained during year one of the program. Five first-year participants were selected to represent urban, suburban, and rural school districts, as well as elementary, middle, and high schools. The interviews were conducted during late May, 1986. These principals were asked to reflect upon the PRIDE experience and to indicate what types of school-based changes they had been able to implement during the next academic year.

Four of the five principals volunteered that the biggest effect of Project PRIDE was to change their attitudes toward special education. One principal disagreed with this apparently widespread belief, indicating that he felt an increased awareness of special education issues was the biggest impact of the program. Other retrospective comments about the project included praise for the very effective training in group dynamics. More

general remarks were volunteered regarding the overall training methods which avoided lectures and concentrated on activities and feedback.

Several principals indicated that there were immediate payoffs from PRIDE participation. One respondent said that he encouraged more parental involvement almost immediately. Another indicated that he encouraged more input from regular education teachers soon after PRIDE training began. Beginning with the new academic year, one school reported initiating trial mainstreaming before a formal change of placement. Another principal remarked that he had begun looking at alternative approaches for special education students and considering "least restrictive" less as a legal term and more as a social and emotional approach to special needs. When asked, several principals reported that they had encountered no barriers to initiated changes. One did comment that he had experienced some central office opposition to planned changes although this was individually considered more a challenge than a barrier.

The year-one participants appeared to be generally quite pleased with their PRIDE experiences a full year after completing the program. One even indicated that members of his local group of PRIDE participants would continue to meet on a regular basis for at least two years after his participation in the program had officially ended.

Funding

PRIDE has been funded for three years through an Education of the Handicapped, Part D (Personnel Preparation), Grant. During the first two years, annual awards of $53,500 were made. For the final year, the award amount increased to $55,218. These grant funds have primarily been directed to expenses for travel, mini-awards for replication costs, and training materials. In addition, the SEA and local school districts have provided approximately 2 million dollars in financial support through salaries, fringe benefits, travel for principals attending local replication training, office space and communication costs.

Conclusion

Project PRIDE has developed, implemented and evaluated a state-wide training and support system for principals. Evaluation results indicate that the training and support systems have been highly successful and have resulted in changes in both attitudes and administrative (on-the-job) behaviors which impact the education of handicapped children.

What we believe - our values - is quite as important as what we know - our knowledge. Through PRIDE, resources in both areas have been provided in order that school principals may put what they believe and what they know into action to improve the quality of education, not only for handicapped students but, for all students attending Kentucky's public schools.